



HISTORY TRAIL



Suitable
for teens
and adults

Duration: 1-1.5 hours

Take care:
you are responsible for the
safety of yourself and your
party. Respect Covid-19
social distancing and
group gathering guidelines.

Respect
any ancient
monument and
remember to put
your rubbish in a
bin or take it home
with you.

On behalf of Colchester
Borough Council, welcome to
Colchester's Castle Park.
Please enjoy your visit.



The park is located at the edge of the town centre and the nearest car parks are
Priory Street, Britannia and Leisure World Colchester: colchester.gov.uk/parking.



If you don't want to drive why not catch the bus to Colchester High Street?

Please check Castle Park opening hours prior to starting the trail colchester.gov.uk/parks

Recycle this sheet if you printed it out at home

INTRODUCTION

The Park was formally opened to the public in 1892 but the landscape has been influenced by over two thousand years of recorded history and has played an integral part in the formation of the town.

The Park's paths have been walked by Romans, Vikings and Saxons; soldiers, Victorians and artisans; criminals, witches and even royalty. The modern park is 25 hectares in size and is registered as Grade II on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. The whole of the upper park is a scheduled Ancient Monument and contains seven listed buildings.

This tour will follow a geographical rather than chronological order so please make use of the timeline if your chronology starts getting confused! You begin at Colchester Castle.



1 COLCHESTER CASTLE

The Castle was built by Eudo Dapifer, High Steward to William the Conqueror, on the site of a Roman temple dedicated to Emperor Claudius and using much of the Roman material found in the town. Construction was started in 1076 and took decades to complete. It remained Crown property throughout medieval times and by the 17th Century the Castle was used as a prison. During this time it was the gruesome site for many of The Witchfinder General Mathew Hopkins' witch trials. It has since been in private hands before coming into Council ownership and becoming a museum in 1860.



We'd love to see photographs taken on the trail. Why not share your pictures with us at [@YourColchester](https://twitter.com/YourColchester) [@EnjoyColchester](https://www.facebook.com/EnjoyColchester) or [@Better Colchester](https://www.instagram.com/BetterColchester) using [#ColchesterCastleParkTrail](https://www.instagram.com/BetterColchester) 

3 HOLLYTREES

This mansion was built in 1716 for local lady, Elizabeth Cornellison – an undertaking that cost her £2000. Her niece, Sarah, inherited the building on Elizabeth's death and moved in with her husband, Charles Grey, in 1727. The building's grounds were not as extensive as the Park today but large parts of the Upper Park (including the castle) were part of the property's formal gardens. The Greys extended the property in 1748, adding most of the current west side of the building. Hollytress was then in private hands until the 1920s when it came into the ownership of the Town, was converted into a museum and was added, along with its gardens, to the Park. It still serves as a museum today. The museum's opening hours have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic. For up to date information visit colchester.cimuseums.org.uk/hollytrees-museum

2 CIVIL WAR OBELISK

This obelisk reminds us of some of the darkest days in Colchester's history. For 11 weeks during a cold, wet summer in 1648 the English Civil War arrived at Colchester's walls in the form of a siege. A Royalist army led by Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle took shelter in the town which was promptly surrounded by Parliamentary forces led by Lord Thomas Fairfax. The Royalist soldiers quickly took provisions from the citizens of Colchester and over 11 long weeks, hundreds of soldiers and civilians died. On the eventual surrender by Lucas and Lisle, both were executed by firing squad on the site of this obelisk.



4 Imola Pond

This fishpond was constructed in 1929 and its design was inspired by the numerous Roman archaeological discoveries that were being made in the Park at the time. It was created to be reminiscent of a Roman bath, with steps leading down towards it and conifers planted to represent Roman columns.

5 Roman Sewers

As you head across what is now a playing field, you are following the line of a Roman street. The grills in the grass are sites of former excavations that unearthed Roman sewers and water works that flushed the temple's waste water away.

6 Duncan's Gate

Continuing across the field, Duncan's Gate is the site of a major excavation and has a brilliantly preserved section of sewer tunnel, however it is, unfortunately, not safe for public access. These examples of the ancient infrastructure of Roman life are a valuable asset to the Town's history.

7 BANDSTAND

Constructed in 1896, the bandstand immediately caused controversy amongst local people. Churchgoers were appalled that concerts were taking place on Sundays and petitioned the Council to ban them. These protestations on religious grounds were strongly opposed by others but nevertheless, concerts were restricted to Thursday afternoons for some years. Most bands in the early days were military bands from the garrison. During WWII, the ornate railings were removed and recycled as part of the war effort – thankfully the original designs for the railings were found in Glasgow University Library which allowed the restoration of the bandstand to its former glory.

8 Roman Villa

These are the surviving remains of what was once three Roman houses that stretched under what is now the bandstand towards the modern-day café. What remains was once the floor of a Roman townhouse built in the 1st Century AD. Each of the three houses was 'c' shaped and two stories tall. The back of the 'c' faced north (down the hill) and the front faced onto a street that largely ran the same direction as the tree lined bandstand footpath.

Underneath these floors, archaeologists found evidence of earlier houses destroyed by Boudicca. Standing on the Roman floor and looking to the bandstand gives an idea of how soil deposits and movement have altered ground levels over the last 2000 years.

9 The Hill

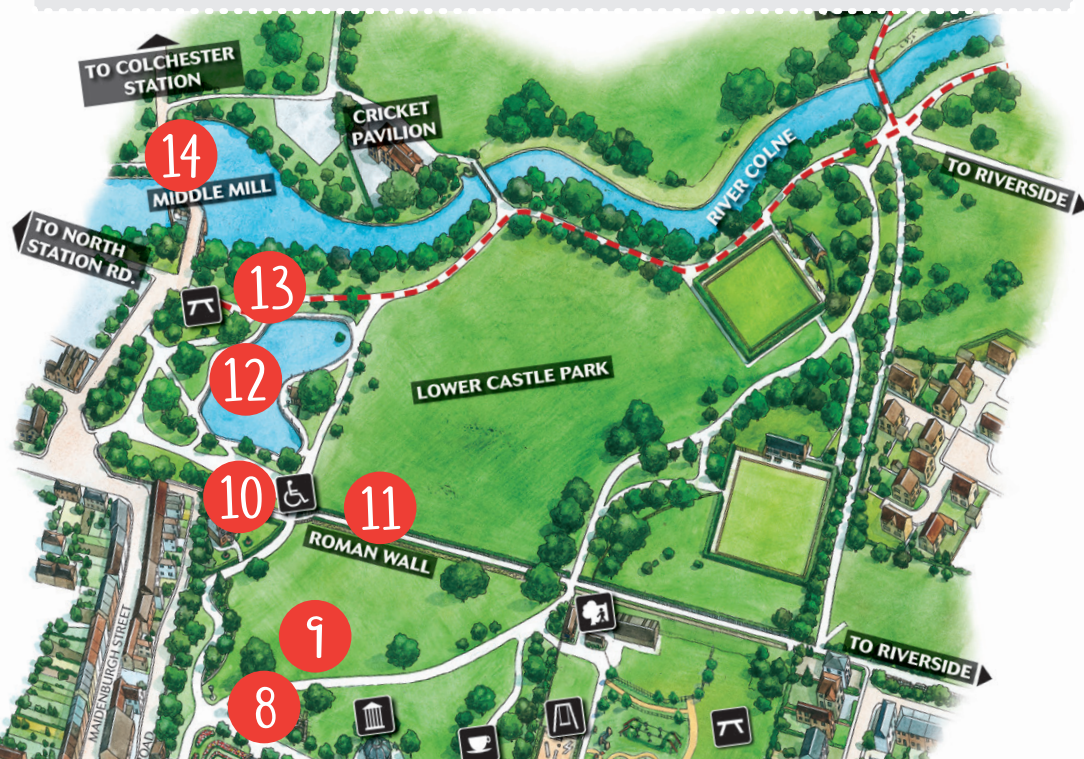
The hill was once used by the Dutch cloth makers living in the Dutch Quarter to dry their dyed cloths on wooden frames called tenter frames, with tenter hooks being used to secure the cloth. As they waited for the cloth to dry and see the quality of the finished product, the cloth makers were said to be on 'tenter hooks'.

10 Gardener's Lodge

This house was built in 1924 for the Park Keeper, the first of whom was a Thomas Munson who led a team of three gardeners. The house is now rented out by the Council.

11 Roman Wall

The remains of Colchester's Roman Wall are the longest and oldest town wall remains in Britain. Built in 70AD after the sacking of Roman Colchester (then called Camulodunum) by the Iceni Queen Boudicca, it once stood at 6 metres tall and 3 metres thick. It is now home to a wide array of mosses, lichens, wildflowers and invertebrates so is a valuable ecological addition to the Park as well as a historical one. 1,578 years later, in 1648, the wall still proved itself effective as a defensive feature during the Siege of Colchester.



12 Boating Lake

The Boating Lake was constructed at the time of the Park's opening and was originally used for the sailing of model boats. The lake was also home to the town's resident swans which were fed out of the public purse!

13 Tank Defences

These concrete blocks were part of Britain's defences in case of German invasion during World War Two. These are tank traps which would stop tanks making the journey through Colchester on the way to London from the coast. Although no invasion came, the Park did see some action during the war - a bomb narrowly missed the Castle and another shattered all the windows in Hollytrees. Thankfully for the people who lived here, Colchester was the most heavily defended town in Essex.

14 Middle Mill Weir

Evidence of a mill at this site has been found dating back to the 1100s when it would have provided flour for the castle. It was then run by St. John's Abbey before the dissolution of the monasteries meant the mill passed into private ownership. It is so called because for centuries it stood between two other mills on the Colne - one the other side of North Bridge and the other at East Bridge. In 1933 the mill was sold to Marriages Mill who stripped it of all its machinery for use in their own mills. The mill building that existed was then sold to the Council in the 1950s but had to be demolished owing to its poor condition - leaving the site largely how it appears today.

49 AD Camulodunum (now Colchester) founded by the Romans

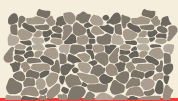


1640s Witch trials held by Matthew Hopkins in the castle



1800s Many works undertaken to create features such as the bandstand, Imola pond and boating lake as well as extensive tree planting

70 AD Roman Wall built



1716 Hollytrees built



1892

49AD

60 AD Queen Boudica revolts - burns down the temple of Claudius (the remains of which exist under the present-day castle)



1076 Construction of Castle begins



1727 Charles Grey and wife, Sarah, take ownership of what is now the Park

1892 Park opened to the public

1648 Siege of Colchester



We hope you enjoyed this trail. Why not check out what else we have to offer at colchester.gov.uk/parks